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Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

Note by the Bureau of the Statistical Commission on follow-up by the Bureau of decisions taken by the Commission at its thirty-sixth session

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission, for information, the note by the Bureau of the Commission on follow-up actions taken by the Bureau since the thirty-sixth session of the Commission. These actions were taken at the specific request of the Commission and are in line with the position voiced by several Commission members that the Bureau should play an active role in the intersession period. This note covers actions related to the review of the Commission's working methods, and the approval of various expert group mechanisms, as well as the finalization of the Commission's agenda.

* E/CN.3/2006/1.

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Note by the Bureau of the Statistical Commission on follow-up by the Bureau of decisions taken by the Commission at its thirty-sixth session

I. Review of the Commission's working methods

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2003/6 of 16 July 2003, had requested each functional commission to examine its methods of work in order to better pursue the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits.

2. At its thirty-fifth session in 2004, the Commission had asked its Bureau to conduct such an examination, with the assistance of the United Nations Statistics Division, and to report back to the Commission.[1] The Bureau presented its report on the review of the Commission's working methods (E/CN.3/2005/2) to the Commission at its thirty-sixth session in 2005. The Commission took note of the suggestions made by the Bureau and agreed to implement some procedures on a trial basis for the thirty-sixth session. The Commission also suggested that the Bureau further analyse the experiences and take them into account in the preparation of the thirty-seventh session.[2]

3. The Chair of the Commission took the initiative of following up on the review and in March 2005, invited all country delegations that had participated in the thirty-sixth session to transmit their comments on the impact of the newly adopted measures. A total of 23 replies were received from chief statisticians, the main conclusions of which will be summarized below.

A. Limiting time for statements

4. All respondents agreed to limit introductory statements for agenda items to a maximum of five minutes. Furthermore, they supported the suggestion by the Chair that once an item had been introduced, a list of speakers should be established. If the list of registered speakers grew long in relation to the remaining time available for the agenda item, the Chair should impose time limits on floor interventions, and preference ought to be given to country representatives.

B. Distinguishing between documents "for discussion" and "for information"

5. All delegates, except one who did not comment, supported the idea of making a distinction between documents "for discussion" and "for information", whereby information items would not be introduced, and the Commission would be expected to take note of the information documents without further debate unless interventions were requested by one or more members.

C. Summarizing the key conclusions after the debate of each agenda item

6. All respondents, except one (who had no comment), agreed that the Chair, assisted by the United Nations Statistics Division, should summarize the key conclusions after the debate on each agenda item. This summary will form the basis for the session report. One country representative suggested that daily session reports be prepared. The overall objective remains to adopt the report on the last day of each session.

D. Briefing for new Commission participants

7. In order to enable new delegates to fully and effectively participate in the proceedings of the session, the Chair with the support of the Secretariat had organized in 2005 a special briefing for new Commission members. The delegates expressed their support for this initiative and encouraged the Statistics Division to continue organizing such briefings for new Commission participants on the Monday before the start of the session.

E. Coordination of group positions to take place during the time of the regular session

8. Nineteen of the respondents supported the suggestion that the Chair should not allow for the coordination of group positions to take place during the time of the regular session. Three Commission members expressed caution in applying such a rule too strictly, pointing out that the formulation and presentation of group positions might, in fact, be time-efficient under certain circumstances.

II. Issues reviewed and approved by the Bureau of the Commission

A. Creation of a United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting

9. The Statistical Commission at its thirty-sixth session in March 2005 endorsed the creation of a United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting and requested that the terms of reference of the Committee be prepared and submitted to the Bureau of the Commission for approval, taking into consideration the terms of reference of the London Group on Environmental Accounting and the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics, so as to avoid overlap and ensure close collaboration mechanisms among the three main groups.[3] The Preliminary Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting, which was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 29 to 31 August 2005, agreed on proposed terms of reference for the Committee, formulated the Committee's long-term objectives, developed its programme of work, and agreed on its governance structure. The Bureau of the Commission approved the terms of references of the United Nations Committee on 18 November 2005 (see also document E/CN.3/2006/9).

B. Energy statistics

10. On 3 August 2005, the Bureau approved the formation of (a) a city group on energy statistics; and (b) an Intersecretariat Working Group on Energy Statistics after reviewing its proposed terms of reference. The recommendation to form these two mechanisms was made by an ad hoc expert group meeting that had been convened in New York from 23 to 25 May 2005 by the Statistics Division at the request of the Commission. The Commission had given the Bureau the mandate to take forward the recommendations of the ad hoc expert working group and to ensure that the implementation of concrete measures began before the next session of the Commission[4] (see also document E/CN.3/2006/10).

C. Issues related to the manner in which national data are used by international organizations

11. At the thirty-sixth session of the Commission, South Africa had presented a background note raising concerns about the manner in which specific national data had been used by international organizations. Subsequently, the Secretariat prepared a brief analytical note reviewing the specific cases mentioned in the background note and providing explanations for the discrepancies between national and international data (in one instance, for example, recent national data had not been taken into account at the international level). The analytical note was sent for information to South Africa and to the Bureau, both of which found satisfactory the specific explanations provided. Nonetheless, the Bureau confirmed the course of action already recommended by the Commission,[5] namely, to refer the general issue of use of country data by international organizations to the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities for further consideration (see also documents E/CN.3/2006/13 and E/CN.3/2006/30).

D. Group of Friends of the Chair on development indicators

12. In 2005, the Statistical Commission had agreed to form a group of Friends of the Chair on development indicators.[6] After a round of consultations, a list of experts[7] who had indicated to the Chairperson their interest in, and preparedness for, being member of the group was drawn up by the Statistics Division for review by the Bureau. In accordance with the decision of the Commission, the members of the Bureau approved the composition and the terms of reference for the Friends of the Chair on 20 July 2005 (see also documents E/CN.3/2006/14 and E/CN.3/2006/15).

III. Approval of the provisional agenda for the thirty-seventh session of the Commission in 2006

13. The Economic and Social Council, in its decision 2005/244 of 22 July 2005, approved the provisional agenda and documentation for the thirty-seventh session of the Commission as recommended by the Commission at its thirty-sixth session. On 7 October 2005, the Bureau of the Commission, in line with its mandate, approved a number of revisions thereto, based on an assessment of the continued relevance of certain agenda items. The Bureau also approved the distinction between discussion

and information items, based primarily on an evaluation of the proposed documentation. If it was anticipated that a document would invite executive action by the Commission, the corresponding agenda item would be classified for discussion. In this context, also, a new overall structure of the agenda was approved, by which all agenda items for discussion would be grouped at the beginning of the session. Under the overall guidance of the Bureau, the website for the thirty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission was opened on 11 November 2005 with the posting of the revised annotated agenda (available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc06/2006-1e-Agenda.pdf) as the first document.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2004, Supplement No. 4* (E/2004/24), chap. V, para. 15 (b).

[2] Ibid., *2005, Supplement No. 4* (E.2005/24), chap. II, para. 5 (a).

[3] Ibid., chap. V, para. 7 (a).

[4] Ibid., chap III, para. 7 (k).

[5] Ibid., chap. VI, para. 37 (b).

[6] Ibid., para. 13 (g).

[7] Australia: Dennis Trewin; Canada: Ivan P. Fellegi; Chile: Maximo Aguilera Reyes; Cuba: Rodolfo Roque; Finland: Heli Jeskanen-Sundstrom; Ghana: Grace Bediako; Iceland: Hallgrimur Snorrason; Italy: Luigy Biggieri; Jamaica: Sonia Jackson; Mexico: Gilberto Calvillo Vives; Russian Federation: Vladimir Sokolin; South Africa: Pali Lehohla; Thailand: Sue Lo-Utai; United States of America: Katherine Wallman.